

They're Here!

New England UFO Detectives Search for the Truth Behind Alien Abduction Reports

by Bill Goffrier and Drew Townson

On the night of September 19, 1961, Barney Hill and his wife Betty were driving home to Portsmouth, NH, after a day of leaf-peeping in the White Mountains. As they drove, they noticed an unusual light in the sky and began to follow it. Soon they found themselves lost on a desolate mountain road. When they finally returned home at dawn, they discovered that their watches had stopped and it was actually much later it should have been. They could not account for several hours of the journey home.

Although they could not consciously remember what had happened during that missing time, the Hills both felt that something disturbing had occurred. They sought the help of a Boston psychiatrist who put them through an intensive regimen of strictly controlled medical hypnosis. Through hypnotic regression, the Hills' buried memories began to surface. They described being taken aboard an alien spacecraft by gray-skinned beings who subjected them to physical experiments. The Hill story became the first and most widely publicized UFO abduction case in history.

Thirty years later, in September, 1991, a New Hampshire UFO Network gathering was held to observe the thirtieth anniversary of the Hill's interrupted journey. The guest of honor was Betty Hill, herself. A rapt crowd of 200, many of them claiming to be abductees themselves, listened as Betty recounted the familiar saga. She told of that night in the mountains, and the years of painstaking therapy that it took to fully unravel the event. She got a bit choked up when the large screen displayed a photo of her husband Barney, who died a troubled man in 1969. Then Betty gave her audience advice on "What to do if it happens to you, or if it already has."

One of the most significant aspects of the Hill case was that it attracted the attention of several highly credible mental health professionals and investigators of the paranormal; people who thought there was something intriguingly truthful about the Hill's story. Many of these noted UFO "celebrities" -- authors, lecturers, and researchers who have become an integral part of the UFO abduction picture -- were on hand and also addressed the group. They were there to discuss an alarming trend = Abduction reports are increasing with such frequency that researchers are unable to keep up with documentation.

Modern abduction reports often mirror that of the Hill's. Encounters often seem to take place in desolate areas; commonly the victim is driving. The term, "Lonely Road Syndrome" classifies such episodes. This is not the only type of close encounter, however. In many cases a craft or vehicle is not even sighted at all, the abductors or visitors simply appear. One of these types of cases is referred to by UFOlogists as "The Bedroom Visitation," in which strange beings enter the victim's room nocturnally. The visit may end there, but sometimes the abductee recalls being transported to an examination room where he or she is probed, tested, and often telepathically spoken to. When the experiencer awakens the next morning, he or she may have little or no conscious memory of the event, or it may seem like "a dream." The experiencer might also report physical symptoms which researchers associate with abductions. Common complaints include the appearance of superficial "scoop mark" scars, presumably caused by the taking of a skin sample, and waking up with nosebleeds, allegedly from a nasal probe. Perhaps the most disturbing of the physical symptoms reported is genital pain or discomfort. An amazing number of abductees, male and female, report being subjected to tests of a reproductive nature: sperm samples, "pregnancy tests", etc. It has recently come to light that Barney Hill reported the taking of a sperm sample. This remained out of the media because it was obviously a taboo subject in the '60's.

Thousands of people now claim to have had abduction experiences. It is difficult to estimate the number of reported cases, and it is felt that there are many encounters to go unreported. One common belief in UFO circles is that everyone knows someone, or knows someone who knows someone, who has been abducted. The reason people are coming out of the closet with their stories is probably due to an increase in public knowledge of the subject. While trash TV and supermarket tabloids serve to trivialize the issue, other popular media have begun to focus a serious eye on abductions. Books like Budd Hopkin's Missing Time and Whitley Strieber's book and film, Communion, are written as non-fiction documentaries. This realistic treatment of the subject has encouraged many "experiencers" to come forward. In fact, both authors are constantly being contacted by people who suspect that they have been abducted.

In response to this new wave of experiencers, these authors as well as other interested parties are hurrying to form a research and support network. It is coming together as a loosely knit association of mental health professionals, case investigators, and even therapy groups. In Betty Hill's day, no such network existed. Today, help can be a phone call away.

The most frequently called man in the field is Budd Hopkins, whose best selling books on abduction have put him in the public eye. Hopkins has become the best-known and possibly the most active abduction researcher in the country. He privately treats abductees, travels far and wide to lecture on the subject, and appears on TV and radio talk shows. Hopkins has recently started a nationwide referral network for abductees called the Intruders Foundation. The I.F. is made up of thirty investigator/therapists around the country. In its short one year history, the I.F. has already handled thousands of inquiries. Since 1976, Hopkins has personally investigated over 400 cases. He receives at least two new inquiries a day from possible abductees.

Hopkins groundbreaking UFO work is self-taught and motivated by his own UFO sighting in Truro, MA on Cape Cod in 1964. Initially, he investigated a variety of typical "lights in the sky" accounts, but by 1976, began to receive stories of a more astounding nature. Through detailed investigation which primarily employs hypnosis, Hopkins found that an amazing number of routine sightings led to buried abduction stories. Also, some abductions turned up that had no apparent UFO sighting involved at all. "I began to fear that there were actually more abductions than UFO sightings," Hopkins admits.

The most recent focus of Hopkins' work is on children's abductions. He has begun to see abductions as a multi-generational family affair. Hopkins has found that many of his adult patients recall recurring encounters which go back to childhood, and further investigation has revealed that the patients' parents may have also been abducted. Hopkins feels that children are reliable subjects because, unlike their adult counterparts, their reports are relatively unpolluted or "pre-seeded" by the media.

Hopkins has recently developed an "Image Recognition Test" to effectively, yet sensitively handle children who describe stories of strange playmates. In the manner of a game, Hopkins shows a child flash cards of several illustrated characters from popular culture (Santa Claus, Batman, a Ninja Turtle, Skeletor). One of the flashcard images is that of a triangular-headed, bug-eyed being based on witness' descriptions of their abductors. The child is asked to identify each character and tell a story about a couple of them. One young boy easily identified the flash cards of Santa, Batman, The Ninja Turtle, and the skeleton. When Hopkins then flashed the card depicting the alien, the boy responded, "That's the strange boy that comes in my room at night." Hopkins has found that the children's stories often fit a pattern of interaction between human children and a group the children call "weird children." These are described by Hopkins as a hybrid race of human/alien halfbreeds clumsily trying to play human games.

The game playing, Hopkins believes is an attempt by the aliens to learn human behavior. His research indicates that genetic engineering is central to the visitor's interest in humans. Hopkins theorizes that not only do the aliens "desperately" want our genetic material, presumably to enrich their own stock, ~~but~~ they also want to assimilate human feelings and emotions.

While Hopkins' theories have gained him the most media attention, there is another larger and more integrated organization in UFOlogy. It is MUFON, the Mutual UFO Network. The international organization has chapters in every state. Its New Hampshire and Massachusetts chapters are among the nation's busiest. MUFON has for years been concerned with proving the existence of UFOs. It's members have been researching and documenting UFO sightings since 1969.

Increasingly, MUFON investigators and appointed consultants - PHDs and mental health professionals - are teaming up to investigate abduction reports. Being a research group first and foremost, MUFON is attempting to gather crucial abduction data.

A MUFON case investigation begins with the use of standardized forms with which all conscious memory information can be documented to become part of the database. If an abduction is indicated, the case frequently moves beyond the routine format. Sometimes, investigators and experiencers agree that hypnosis is an appropriate step to attempt to recover buried details of conscious events. Investigators may suggest their own technique of mild hypnosis or relaxation. Many also offer an option of working with professionals trained in relaxation therapy or hypnosis, be they licensed social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists. Additional details uncovered under hypnosis often fill in gaps in conscious memories and can complete a witness' story, but may require a year or more of work.

A local example of an experiencer who turned to MUFON for assistance is Carol, an Allston Resident. For years, Carol was having what she termed "UFO-related paranormal experiences" which were a source of high anxiety. As a child, Carol was extremely afraid of the dark, never sleeping without a light, and often fighting sleep until the sun rose. As a teenager, Carol had recurrent dreams of strange people in odd vehicles coming out of the sky for her, making her paralyzed.

But it was ten years ago that she first began to consciously experience bedroom visitations. At that time, a fair skinned man in black appeared to her while she was in bed at night. She was frightened at first, but was soon calmed as he stared at her. After a period of time, he walked away, toward a back door, which curiously remained bolted after he apparently left through it. During the same year, Carol also received a series of strange phone calls. She would answer the phone and hear only hollow metallic clanging sounds or occasional beeping. This odd phenomenon mirrors many other abduction or visitation cases. Naturally, Carol was afraid to tell even her closest friends about these experiences, and the concept of "visitors."

Like many experiencers, Carol first contacted Budd Hopkins for help. Hopkins met personally with Carol a few times, but for the most part referred her to Joe Nyman, a trusted colleague in the Boston area. Nyman is one of Massachusetts MUFON's busiest investigators, and a software engineer by trade. Like Budd Hopkins, Joe researched UFO sightings in the 60's and during most of the 70's before encountering claims of alien abduction. Since 1978, he has personally investigated 72 New England abduction cases. Although he maintains a low profile, Nyman receives local cases through MUFON as well as through a loose knit network of past clients and other investigators. He's not a professional psychologist, but uses common psychological methodology in his work. His primary goal is to give the experiencer a positive and confidential place to turn.

Nyman begins a typical case with a phone interview to determine the credibility of a subject. Then, in person, he evaluates a new "experiencer" through a psychologist-prepared questionnaire which helps determine basic mental and physical health, substance use, and paranormal abilities. If he feels the person has psychological problems, he will recommend conventional treatment before addressing UFO related experiences. Once he does take on a subject, a series of sessions begin which involve informal talks and possibly hypnotic regression. These sessions may continue for months or years.

Through Nyman's years of sessions with Carol, he observed an emerging pattern of lifelong encounters with seemingly alien beings. After hypnotic regression, she recognized her bedroom visitor as a hybrid, mostly human being. Regression also surfaced that the bedroom visitations had occurred even as far back as crib age.

Delving into her experiences actually increased Carol's anxiety at first. Even though she felt a deep trust in her investigator, and a need to continue the regressions, she still felt isolated. Carol wanted the validation and support that could come from meeting with real people, first hand, who were going through the same ordeal.

Nyman brought Carol into a support group he supervised, and she found some relief. In a support group, under an investigator's or therapist's guidance, experiencers discuss the commonalities of their encounters. However, the point is not to compare details. "What's valuable about a support group," according to Carol, "is the sharing of emotions. Once I joined the group, my feelings of isolation went away," Carol says. "While my experiences continue, it is comforting to know I am not the only one who has these feelings."

Carol attended bimonthly group meetings regularly and after the first year with Nyman's group she found a group that met closer to her home; one that continues to offer her support under the direction of Harvard Professor of Psychiatry, John E. Mack, M.D.

Mack was a UFO skeptic until he met Budd Hopkins several years ago. Mack was amazed by the similarity between the different abduction cases reported by Hopkins. He noted that people with absolutely no foreknowledge of the subject, or knowledge of each other, reported dramatically similar abduction details.

In the past year, Mack has taken on between 25 and 30 cases, each with an interest in treating the abductee's trauma, which he sees as very real. According to Mack, an abductee's trauma is the same as typical trauma, with a couple of exceptions. For example, one unique aspect of the abduction experience for the victim, he believes, is the "shattering of consensus reality." (A person's 'consensus reality' does not admit the possibility of being abducted by aliens.) In addition, most typical traumatic experiences happen only once, while many abductees report recurring encounters.

In addition to treating abductions, Mack's agenda is to convince not only other scientists, but society as a whole to take the abduction issue seriously. Meanwhile, his colleagues in the mainstream scientific community are waiting for the elusive "hard evidence" before entering the field. Dr. Mack insists that "we have to hold forth that experience is data."

After three years of work with Hopkins, Nyman, and Mack, Carol feels that her initial sense of trauma or victimization has been resolved, and she continues to strive to attain a healthy and positive state of mind. She explains, "It's important to have a connection with someone who truly believes you, because they can help more than a well meaning friend or spouse who doesn't understand."

Many of Nyman's subjects come to view themselves as participants in a positive process, rather than unwilling victim. "You may come away from it all still not knowing the answers to all your questions," Carol says, "and you might not know what really happened to you, but you can better integrate the incidents into your life so they no longer bother you."

Unfortunately, not everyone comes through the process feeling as good as Carol. Some critics believe that the experiencer's mental well-being is being jeopardized by some nonprofessional researchers, who care more about proving their pet theories about aliens than helping the victim.

One outspoken proponent of putting the abductee in the hands of trained professionals is Dr. David A. Gotlib, MD, a Canadian physician and hypnotherapist. Gotlib points out that the well-being of the abductee is not always the first priority of some researchers, whose primary agenda is to probe UFO phenomena. He has charted incidents in which overzealous, untrained "investigators" have frightened subjects deeper into their shells. For example, a patient of Gotlib's had originally contacted a "support group" to seek help for her post-abduction anxiety. The group looked disapprovingly at her lifestyle and spiritual nature. When she told them she had once been in the care of a psychiatrist, the group hastily concluded that her abduction story was bogus.

They told her she was an overly imaginative woman and that she should get in touch with reality. Later, she heard through the grapevine that the group had called her "a flake" behind her back. Needless to say, the episode made her afraid to speak with anyone else about her abduction. She lost most of her self-esteem and fell into a clinical depression before contacting Dr. Gotlib some time later.

There's no question that some bad work is being done. Hopkins says, "when you talk about a subject as crazy as this one is, you have to assume that there are going to be groups and individuals who do more harm than good." In fact, the field is so new that no standardized approach to treatment exists. Most corners of UFOlogy agree that steps must be taken to adapt consistent methodology.

Any skeptic of abductions can clearly see that there is a lack of conclusive physical evidence, but the growing number of investigators remain undaunted. They are driven to unearth and assemble hard facts and missing pieces of the puzzle.

Both Nyman and Hopkins find the feelings of the experiencers to be very real. Nyman sympathizes with his subjects' positive view of the abduction experience. Conversely, Hopkins feels that his subjects have suffered far more from their abductions than they have benefited. Like Dr. Mack, he points to the clear presence in their psychological makeup of symptoms reminiscent of post traumatic stress disorder. Hopkins is reluctant to speculate on where the abductors are from. He does, however, believe that the beings and their elaborate reproductive experiments are real.

Many efforts are underway to extend awareness and acceptance of the UFO abduction phenomenon. Hopkins spends a large amount of time lecturing to psychiatrists to gain support wherever possible. Carol is establishing a new referral system that may offer help to Boston area experiencers. Mack hopes to have his data published in psychiatric journals, on a mission to draw the clinical community's attention to abductions. Mack says "I am sometimes impatient, it's time that culture took this seriously."

What does this accumulating data add up to? Is there simply a growing number of delusional people out there, perhaps mentally "polluted" by the media? Or, are there really alien abductions taking place here in New England and elsewhere? Hopkins believes the latter is true, and says, "The interaction of human beings with beings from another place is the biggest event in human history."

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SUGGESTED SIDEBAR ARTICLE

Are You Experienced?

Are you, or is someone you know, troubled by what you suspect to be a UFO abduction experience? The following are some of the national or regional organizations you can contact. MUFON investigators do not charge for their services. Therapists may or may not charge.

Intruders Foundation
PO Box 30233
New York, NY 10011
212-645-5278

MUFON, Inc.
103 Oldtowne Road
Seguin, TX 78155-4099
512-379-9216

Massachusetts MUFON
Hotline - 617-944-3775

The following books present information pertaining to UFO abductions. NOTE: Many researchers suggest that possible abductees avoid exposure to this literature. They feel that it can distort memories of experiences, especially prior to an investigation.

Intruders, Budd Hopkins

Missing Time, Budd Hopkins

Communion, Whitley Strieber

Transformation, Whitley Strieber

The Gulf Breeze Sightings, Ed and Frances Walters

The Watchers, Raymond E. Fowler

The Interrupted Journey, John G. Fuller